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Secretary of the Interior Cecil D, Andrus announced today that he has asked the Department of Justice to file protective notices of appeal from a federal District Court decision involving reservations of easements on Alaskan lands conveyed to Natives.

The Alaska District Court ruled in two cases which had been consolidated for hearing (Calista Corp. v. Andrus and Sealaska Corp. v. Secretary of Interior) that certain aspects of the easement policy adopted by former Secretary Morton had been in violation of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). Many of the conveyances of land to Native Corporations in Alaska under that Act have been delayed by litigation over the easement policy.

Secretary Andrus said the Department had not yet made a final determination as to what aspects of the District. Court decision, if any, the Department would seek to have overruled by the appellate court. "A full scale review of our easement policy is under way. This review is not yet completed because of the complicated legal principles and interpretations involved. Because of the time limit for filing a notice of appeal, the Department has asked the Justice Department to file a protective notice to preserve all of our options until the review is completed," he said.

Secretary Andrus express concern over the delays in conveying land to Alaska Natives under the Native Claims Settlement Act. "I expect our review will be completed promptly, and I will make every effort, regardless of whether I decide to appeal all or part of the District Court decision, to expedite the conveyance of land to the Natives," he said.